

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2012 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

<b>Legal Applicant Name:</b> Martha O'Bryan Center <b>Program Name:</b> THRIVE	<b>Application ID:</b> 12AC133318
<i>For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. This feedback is provided on a restricted basis and cannot be shared or distributed outside of your organization. We hope you will find this information helpful in completing applications to our future grant competitions. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of your application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory.</i>	
<b>Reviewers Summary Comments:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The applicant thoroughly presents the need for academic achievement programs within the target community. The applicant supplies ample evidence that the students are in need of this type of assistance. This is evidenced by every elementary and middle school in the area receiving an "F" in math, reading, social studies, and science, in the statewide 2010 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program results. Every school also fails to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress federal benchmarks. The applicant provides further evidence of this need by stating the low graduation rate at the local high school (61%). Furthermore, the applicant points out that only 5.8% of residents in the area have attained a college degree.</li><li>• The applicant provides sufficient evidence that the proposed program design will be successful in addressing the need. This is supported both by studies which show the effectiveness of after-school programs and by data, which show past successes in the applicants' program. However, while the applicant provides supporting evidence for most of its programming, they fail to fully show evidence of the efficacy of the math-based curriculum (Marilyn Burns Math, and Touch Math).</li><li>• The applicant clearly defines the anticipated outcomes, and how these will address the identified need. For example: 87% of participating elementary school students will increase their reading scores by one grade level. The applicant also clearly defines how the outcomes will be measured and verified, for instance peer mentoring will be measured by pre- and post-tests using the Youth Outcome Survey. The applicant states that all assessment data will be entered into their Efforts to Outcomes data system on a weekly basis, showing a clear method of data collection and assessment.</li><li>• Community needs are well documented as evidenced by the following in the target area: between 82-98% of the children and youth qualify for free and reduced lunch; all elementary and middle schools scored F's in math, reading, social studies and science according the Statewide 2010 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program and none met the Adequate Yearly Progress federal benchmarks. Additionally, there is a 41.2% suspension rate at the Magnet High School, compared to 12.9% for the district. From 2004 - 2010, the graduation rate was 61% compared to the state goal of 90%.</li></ul>	

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- The applicant clearly describes the role of AmeriCorps members serving at the Martha O'Bryan Center: Education Specialists (seven full-time and seven half-time requested) serve as tutors, work with teachers to help students, lead homework help sessions and other activities; Academic Coaches (two full-time requested) work with middle school students to help prepare them for high school success; Parent Coordinators (two full-time requested) monitor grades and attendance in an attempt to catch potential problems early; GED Specialist (one full-time requested) helps adults prepare to enter the workforce; Mentoring Coach (one full-time requested) works with Big Brothers Big Sisters to provide peer mentoring matches; and BOOST Tutors (ten half-time requested) provide small group literacy and math tutoring.
- The applicant describes training that Members receive in Performance Management, which focuses on five components: leadership, management, accountability, measuring and monitoring to learn, and build and sustain capacity. This will allow the AmeriCorps members to collect information that will indicate program success. The applicant additionally identifies the Efforts to Outcome database as the program tracking and data collection software to be used.
- AmeriCorps members are trained to use the Youth Program Quality Assessment (YPQA) which is a validated assessment tool designed to evaluate the quality of youth programs and identify staff development needs. The YPQA is based on observation and Members will be taught how to gather evidence by observation.
- The applicant clearly described the target community. Of this population, 88% is African American, 89% of households are headed by a single parent, 59% of the residents are under age 18, the average annual household income is less than \$6,000, and 45% of the adults are unemployed. The problems in this community are persistent and systemic, balanced among poverty, lack of education, and its aftermath, unemployment. The applicant has made education a priority, based on evidence by the National Center for Family Literacy and Even Start which shows that improved educational opportunity leads to more and better employment choices and higher wages in the future. To this end, the program will attempt to improve academic performance for students in school, help dropouts earn their GED, and encourage graduates to go to college.
- The applicant provides clear goals to be achieved at the end of the three-year program through a combination of academic coaching, tutoring, and mentoring. Specifically, 71 of 82 elementary students will increase their reading scores by one grade (87%); 46 of 56 middle school students will increase skills in reading by one grade level (82%), 30 of 40 high school students will graduate on time (75%), 30 of 40 high school students will enroll in a post-secondary institution (75%), 48 of 60 adult learners will obtain their GED (80%). Standardized tests will measure reading achievement twice a year. Pre- and post-tests using the Youth Outcome Survey will measure peer-mentoring success. Transcripts will verify graduation, and college acceptance letters along with financial aid letters will verify enrollment in post-secondary institutions. Assessment data will be input weekly in Efforts to Outcomes, the data tracking system. In this way, the program should be able to document the positive impact of their intervention on the targeted community.
- The applicant has recorded a successful history of improving the performance of students who attend

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the Martha O'Bryan Center. In past evidence, 88% (or 97 of 110 students) increased a grade in a core subject, while 100% of children raised their reading and math scores. Positive social/emotional growth was displayed by 81% of children (evaluated using the Youth Quality Assessment Program resource), while their parents engaged in two or more after school activities. Eighty-one percent of children with three or more absences in the first grading period had at least 95% attendance by the end of term. All 64 Stratford High School seniors who were part of the Center's Top Floor program graduated; 50 of them are now attending college. Therefore, the intervention described in the document convincingly presents a program that not only can work, but already is.

- Although this program does offer strong reasons to suggest that AmeriCorps members will be highly effective in helping the target population to achieve described goals, not all claims are substantiated. Specifically, full-time AmeriCorps members with college degrees in education, science, or counseling/social work arrive with at least the rudiments of professional training in some of the issues facing the target population (i.e., poverty and enrichment deprivation). Half-time Members, many of whom are college students themselves, demonstrate strong math, science, and English skills to facilitate homework assistance and academic tutoring. AmeriCorps members with college degrees or college experience serve as role models for the target population.
- Active learners themselves, they contribute to the culture of learning that the applicant is trying to create. However, two claims that AmeriCorps members serve as highly effective contributors to the target community are largely unsubstantiated. Although it is suggested that recruited Members may themselves come from underprivileged backgrounds and thus be well able to identify with student needs, no evidence is given of such recruitments having been made in the past. The applicant also suggests that students listen to and learn from AmeriCorps members better than their other contacts and that they coordinate among students, parents, and schools "like no other educator." No evidence is offered to substantiate this claim.
- The community needs to be addressed are compelling and well documented as evidenced both by U.S. Census figures that indicate the degree of poverty within the target community, as well as Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program Results that indicate that none of the five schools to be served have passing results for math, reading, social studies and science, nor have the schools reached the Adequate Yearly Progress federal benchmarks.
- The AmeriCorps members will be a highly effective means of meeting the needs of this community because of the educational experience and backgrounds that are sought by the applicant to fill 13 full- and 17 half-time slots.
- The applicant makes extensive use of its partnerships with area colleges and universities (Vanderbilt, Fisk, Belmont Tennessee State and Middle Tennessee Universities). The applicant will be able to place more experienced educators into high need communities. The extensive training to prepare the Members will ensure that they are able to carry out the tutoring, mentoring and monitoring tasks they are assigned while improvement is built into the model through bi-monthly evaluations.
- The applicant indicates that the added value of AmeriCorps members is the key ingredient in a new

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developing approach to sustainability for the THRIVE program known as the MOB Service Practicum. The Members will participate in this practicum thereby advancing their own skills while they recruit participants from area professionals and college students who will give a year of service to the Center. Deeper connections with area colleges will be made because of the Service Practicum. Through a partnership with Nashville businesses and universities, Members and volunteers will receive an in-kind benefits package. For the recruited volunteers this will be an added incentive to the academic internship practicum.

- Because the applicant has extensive statewide and citywide non-profit, educational, and corporate partnerships, the Members have access to professional training and connections as they work with volunteers at the center and in other community volunteer opportunities such as Make a Difference Day and Your Money Your Choices. The Members will participate in the Volunteer Tennessee Conference on Volunteerism and Service-Learning, Performance Match training, and Nashville After Zone Alliance trainings and activities.
- The applicant convincingly links all four of the major elements required in this grant. The identified need for educational interventions to fill the wide gap in educational opportunities leading to family and financial success is evidenced by the high poverty level, low employment and educational achievement level. By utilizing evidence- and research-based interventions during out of school time such as tutoring, mentoring and one-on-one academic coaching, the Members and volunteers will expand the services of the applicant. The Members are uniquely positioned to deliver these services due to their education, professional direction and interpersonal skills and will add value through the development of the Service Practicum Program with additional qualified volunteers for program sustainability. The applicant's history of successful interventions along with its timely data gathering processes and analysis will ensure progress towards outcomes.
- The applicant did not describe a specific documentation or testing methodology or evaluation processes.